IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A 3D model retrieval method for retrieving a 3D model similar to the specified 3D model from a plurality of 3D models stored in a database, the method comprising:

displaying a plurality of 3D models ~~model~~, the plurality of 3D models as a whole having a hierarchial structure ~~made of a plurality of subelements, the each subelement corresponding to a unit in human recognition~~;

specifying one [[a]] 3D model ~~subelement~~ of the hierarchical structure ~~3D model~~ as a retrieval key by allowing a user to designate one of the plurality of 3D models ~~subelements~~ displayed, the user being able to change to the level of the hierarchy to which the specification is made with a successive operation;

acquiring the feature values of the 3D model ~~subelement~~ specified as the retrieval key from the database;

acquiring the feature values of the 3D model ~~subelements~~ stored in the database as objects to be retrieved ~~in the database~~;

calculating the similarity between the 3D model ~~subelement~~ specified as the retrieval key and 3D models ~~subelements~~ stored as objects to be retrieved in the database by evaluating the differences of the both of the acquired feature values;

sorting the results of the calculation of the similarity; and

displaying a 3D model retrieved based on the result of the sorting.

2. (Currently Amended) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein the hierarchial structure ~~of the 3D model~~ is a tree structure.

3-5. (Cancelled)

6. (Currently Amended) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein each of the 3D ~~model~~ models has attribute information ~~corresponding to the subelements of the 3D model~~, and

the displaying the 3D model includes displaying attribute information corresponding to the ~~subelements of the~~ 3D model at the same time.

7-9. (Cancelled)

10. (Currently Amended) A 3D model retrieval system for retrieving a 3D model from a plurality of 3D models stored in a database ~~by using various feature values calculated from the selected 3D model~~, the system comprising[[:]] a computer and a display and at least one of a keyboard and a mouse,

wherein the computer causes the display ~~a display section configured~~ to display a plurality of 3D models ~~model~~, the 3D models as a whole having a hierarchial structure ~~made of a plurality of subelements corresponding to a unit in human recognition~~;

wherein the computer comprises:

a specifying section configured to specify one ~~a subelement of the~~ 3D model of the hierarchical structure as a retrieval key by allowing a user to designate one of the plurality of 3D models ~~subelements~~ displayed with the at least one of the keyboard and the mouse, the user being able to change to the level of the hierarchy to which the specification is made with a successive operation;

a retrieval key feature values acquisition section configured to acquire the feature values of the 3D model ~~subelement~~ specified as the retrieval key from the database;

a retrieval object feature values acquisition section configured to acquire the feature values of the 3D models ~~subelements~~ stored as objects to be retrieved in the database;

a degree-of-similarity computing section configured to calculate the similarity between the 3D model ~~subelement~~ specified as the retrieval key and 3D models ~~subelements~~ stored as objects to be retrieved in the database by evaluating the differences of the both of the acquired feature values; and

a sorting section for sorting the results of the calculation of the similarity[[;]], and

wherein the computer causes the display ~~section is configured~~ to display the 3D model retrieved based on the result of the sorting.

11. (Cancelled)